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ABSTRACT

The beginning of the teacher center concept in other countries can be specifically pinpointed in time and place, but the origins of teacher centers in America can be traced to a) post-World War II laboratory schools; b) state and federal legislation of the 1960s and early 70s; c) cries of outrage at American education in both the professional and popular literature of the last two decades; d) national and state offices of education study groups, commissions, and mandates; or e) professional educators in the field. American teacher centers can be categorized according to organizational structure and function. There are seven organizational structures: a) Independent, which has no formal ties to an institution; b) "Almost" Independent, which, although linked to an educational institution, experiences a high degree of autonomy; c) Single-unit Center, which is characterized by its association with an administration by a single educational institution; d) the Professional Organization Teaching Center; e) Free Partnership, which is the result of a collaboration of two institutions; f) Free Consortium, which is a collaborative effort by more than two institutions; and g) Legislative/Political Consortium. A teacher center may serve one or more of the following functions at the same time: a) facilitating the exploration of new ideas by teachers; b) advocating a specific philosophical or programmatic thrust; and c) meeting the specific educational needs of individuals or institutions. (HMD)

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TEACHER CENTERS: WHERE DO THEY COME FROM AND WHY?

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I guess the title of this presentation can be interpreted in more than one way. There are those who see in the title an historical question. That is, "What is the geneology of the concept--Teacher Center?" On the other hand, some may interpret the question as seeking a more contemporaneous perspective--that is, "What are the motivating forces, both general and specific, which have given rise to centers presently in existence." In the latter interpretation, by "general" motivating forces I mean the field-wide movements, the popular thrusts, the legislative and political mandates which constitute the "where from" part of the question. By "specific" motivating forces I mean the functions of or needs served by centers. In other words, the "why" part of the question.

Some may ask, "Why make the distinction? Treat both interpretations." The simple truth of the matter is that if you talk about centers outside the United States (British teachers' centers, centers in the Netherlands, or the education centers of Japan) an historical treatise is rather simple and straightforward. Centers in those countries have a definite beginning, not only in time, but in content area or major educational field. And they have a somewhat uniform development within each particular country. In fact, when educators in each of these countries talk to each other about centers, though they may use a different term than we do, they know what each is talking about. They are talking about the same thing to each other. As all of you know, this is not true in American educational circles; particularly regarding the centers concept. Here, centers have different historical backgrounds, depending on your definition of "center."

In England, teachers' centers grew rather spontaneously out of the frustrations British teachers were having in the early 1960's with the Nuffield Curricula in math and science. The Nuffield Foundation, shortly after the Sputnik launching, funded projects designed to produce new programs of education to meet the technological challenge from the East. These new programs took the form of general guides to teachers concerning mathematics and science teaching. As teachers began to communicate to each other their frustrations with the guides, they found places to meet over tea and plan together. As they found themselves increasingly successful in solving their teaching problems this way, these meeting places (Teachers' Centers) became more widespread and institutionalized.

In Holland, the Dutch version of teacher centers grew out of an attempt to combine the resources of the three education factions in that country--Catholic, Protestant, and State. The organization which emerged shortly after World War II was called the Central Pedagogic Institute, a national center interested primarily in elementary education. Unfortunately, this central institute was far removed from the reality of regional and local needs. In the early 1960's, therefore, regional and local centers were instituted with national funds. The regional centers grew out of a need for depositories of curriculum resources and for "help in developing answers to intractable pedagogic questions."[1] The local advisory bureaus, on the other hand, grew out of widespread interest in achievement and ability testing. Only recently have they begun to take on the curriculum development thrust most typical of the centers of Great Britain and Japan.

The Japanese centers, quite like the British counterpart, had a

grassroots beginning. Thirty or forty years ago (and today also) teachers (particularly science teachers) in Japan got together in houses, at school, or elsewhere in general groups called "study circles."[2] As teachers needs and technological advances increased, these small circles needed more formalized accomodations, complete with laboratories, libraries and equipment storage areas. In time, these formalized "centers" became popular throughout the country and today every prefecture has an "Education Center" where research and inservice education is carried on. Although these centers began as science centers, today many of the centers include work in most curriculum areas.

Quite unlike "centers" in these three countries, teacher centers in American education are not so clearly defined. Consequently, to answer the question, "where do they come from?" in an historical perspective is a monumentally complex task. Depending on your concept of "Teacher(s')/ Teaching Center," its historical antecedents can be traced back twenty-five years,[3] ten years,[4,5] five years,[5,6] three years,[7] or even one year ago.[8] In addition to the various "legitimate" definitions of centers now being bandied about (and incidently, I don't know how one determines legitimate from non-legitimate definitions) the teacher center movement has suffered the typically American "Bandwagon Effect;" otherwise known as the "call it whatever is popular, but do your own thing, in your own way" phenomenon.

This phenomenon is supported empirically by a study which Dr. Sam Yarger and I have been conducting for the past two years.[9] By means of a survey of school districts, universities and selected organizations nominated to us as being "centers" we hoped to "get a handle" on the concept. In this way, we thought we might be able to "pin down" the attributes

of the concept which would distinguish teaching centers from other programs and would, incidently, provide for us an historical perspective on an overall concept. Much to our chagrin, just the opposite happened. The concept could not be narrowed down to a single set of attributes and the historical antecedents proved to be many and varied. Programs which seemed to fit our general definition could trace their origins to:

(1) Post-World War II laboratory schools. Several educators have indicated their belief that some centers are no more than "lab schools" with a new name. Particularly noted among these type centers have been those which deal exclusively or almost exclusively with pre-service teacher education. These centers often go by the name Teacher Education Centers.

(2) State and Federal legislation of the 1960's and early 1970's. The Kanawha Valley Multi-Institutional Teacher Education Center (MITEC) is one center, now independent of federal funds or enactments, which traces its origins to the Multi-State Teacher Education Project (M-STEP) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title V. In New York State (and other states) agencies known as Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) have eminated from legislation to improve educational offerings to students within local educational agency (LEA) regions. Recently, centers in the form of consortia relationships have been legislatively prescribed in Florida.

(3) Cries of outrage at American Education in both the professional and popular literature of the 1960's and 1970's. I need not go into the long list of books, papers, and foundation reports attacking education and the training of teachers with which we are all too familiar. Suffice to say that some centers have developed out of the community, with the assistance of local educators, in an attempt to bring all persons

concerned with education (parents, students, teachers, and other community folks) into educational endeavors. Teachers Inc. in New York City, is but one example of a center which finds its origin principally in cooperation between parents and teachers.

(4) National and State offices of education study groups, commissions, and mandates. An example which is "close to home" for me is New York State. The New York State Board of Regents' mandate for competency-based teacher education programs carries with it the requirement that local education agencies, teachers, and community representatives be involved in developing newly approved programs. Many see in this mandate the implication that teacher education and re-education in New York State must be a "center"-type program.

The Appalachian Training Complex, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina, is an example of a center developed in cooperation with Task Force '72 of the U.S. Office of Education. Task Force '72 "spent twelve months brainstorming with leading educators about the needs of national educational leadership."[10] The leading suggestions for resolution of our most pressing national problems posed by the Task Force implied the need for cooperation among interested parties in the development of education and teacher education programs--in other words, some kind of "centers" or "consortium" approach.

(5) And certainly not least among these, the professional educators"in the field". Either individually or through various professional organizations, they are taking (often demanding) the responsibility for their own personal and professional growth and development. In many cases this "personal responsibility" approach to education and re-education is based on teachers teaching each other, much in the tradition of the British

Teachers' Centers. In the Princeton (N.J.) Regional School District, "The Wednesday Program" provides for inservice programs and activities one afternoon per week (students are sent home early) for the entire staff on a voluntary basis. Another example is Unity Maine's District #3 which has gone to a four-day school week for students, leaving Fridays as in-service days for teachers. A third example is the Scarsdale (N.Y.) Teachers' Center which (contrary to what Dave Selden will talk about in a few minutes), I understand is a center negotiated into the teachers' contract by the Scarsdale Teachers' Association.

Consequently, when asked the question "where do teacher/teaching centers come from and why?" one must take into consideration the specific center or type of center one is talking about. This, of course, poses another problem. That is, how does one know what kind of center one is talking about? I would like to conclude my remarks today by describing a scheme which is being developed to help answer that question.[11] Dr. Yarger has informed me that he does not intend to "toot his own horn" about this today, so I will.

As a result of the study which I mentioned earlier, Dr. Yarger has developed a tentative scheme for classifying centers by (1) organizational structure and (2) by function. Our study seems to indicate that organizationally centers can fall primarily into one of seven types:

The Independent Teaching Center--characterized by the absence of any formal ties to an institution. Although program directors and implementors experience a tremendous amount of freedom and flexibility they also suffer from a paucity of funds and fund sources.

The "Almost" Independent Teaching Center--although linked to an educational institution (either college or school system) the program

directors and implementers experience a high degree of autonomy. Those of you familiar with centers around the country might consider the Philadelphia Teacher Center under the direction of Donald Rosmussen as exemplary of this type.

The Single Unit Teaching Center--probably the most common type of American center is characterized by its association with and administration by a single educational institution. Typically, this type of center is a highly organized, highly sophisticated, and explicitly goal directed inservice program.

The Professional Organization Teaching Center--which can be of two types: the "negotiated" teacher association center mentioned earlier, and the "subject area" center which often emerges out of concerns of a particular subject-focused organization such as NCSS or NCTE. These type centers are clearly the rarest of American centers.

The Free Partnership Teaching Center--which is the simplest of the consortium type centers. This center is based on collaborative efforts of only two institutions, usually a college or school of education and a public school system.

The Free Consortium Teaching Center--characterized by three or more institutions and/or agencies. Because of the number of involved parties organizational patterns, communications, commitments and policy-making structures are more complex than in the partnership and program development is more general, as the goals and constraints of each party must be taken into account. Incidently, the term "free" in these last two types refers to the members' willingly joining each other rather than being "forced" by legislative/political mandates.

The Legislative/Political Consortium--characterized by the fact that its organization and constituency is prescribed either by legislative

mandate or by political influence. Most notable among this type of Center are and will be the Centers emerging out of Florida's Legislature mandate and New York's Board of Regents competency-based certification guidelines.

In addition to these structural types there seems to be, basically, four functional types among Centers. (Some centers may have overlapping functions; i.e., they may serve more than one of these functions at the same time). These functional types are:

(1) The Facilitating-Type Teaching Center - description of which is borrowed in part from Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weil [12]. "This type of center purports to provide an atmosphere which will allow the teacher to explore new ideas and techniques either through direct interaction with other teachers or via 'hands on' experience with new curriculum materials."[13] This type of center is very close to the informal "English" type teachers' center.

(2) The Advocacy-Type Teaching Center - characterized by visible commitment to a specific philosophical or programmatic thrust, such as "open education".

(3) The Responsive-Type Teaching Center - which may be one of two sub-types. The first attempts to respond to specific needs of individual educators or groups of educators. The second is concerned with meeting institutional needs. In either case the center promotes itself as not being dominated by any one philoscphical thrust.

(4) The Functionally Unique Teaching Center - one about which I still argue with Dr. Yarger. He describes this type center as one serving a limited, unique function which might include materials develop-

ment, research, and/or field testing of available materials. It may have started as a classroom serving a particular type of student need and then blossomed into a demonstration center. I see only three distinct types of centers along the "functions" continuum and this type as one which serves several of the above functions (Facilitative, Advocacy, Responsive) simultaneously.

For more detailed descriptions of these various types of centers, I recommend the Spring 1974 issue of the Journal of Teacher Education guest edited by Dr. Allan Schmeider and Dr. Sam Yarger. Drs. Schmeider and Yarger explain this scheme in greater detail in their lead article.[13] Incidentally, the major thematic section of this recent issue of JTE is on the concept of Teaching Centers and represents probably the first attempt to publish a single work devoted to discussing the concept and the issues surrounding the concept in American Education.

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